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II. UNFPA: ANNUAL REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND PROGRAMME-LEVEL ACTIVITIES

B. Programme priorities and future directions

1. In her introduction to the report on programme priorities and future directions of UNFPA in light of the ICPD (document DP/1995/25 and Corr. 1), the Executive Director noted that the selection of the programme priorities proposed in the report had taken into account the Fund's experience and comparative advantage and had been guided by the concerns and recommendations of various internal and external evaluations, as well as the comments of Board members. She reiterated the Fund's commitment to work closely with other agencies and organizations within the United Nations system, as well as with bilateral and non-governmental organizations. She briefly reviewed the Fund's operational strategy as well as its strategy for resource allocation. She concluded by noting the two proposed institutional adjustments that were particularly important to UNFPA: the change in designation of UNFPA Country Directors to UNFPA Representatives; and the establishment of a separate Executive Board for UNFPA.

2. Before opening the floor for discussion, the President of the Executive Board invited the Assistant Administrator of UNDP to make a statement on behalf of the Administrator. The Assistant Administrator informed the Board that the Administrator strongly supported the agreement between UNDP and UNFPA to designate UNFPA Country Directors as UNFPA Representatives. He said the Administrator firmly believed that such action would further strengthen the resident coordinator system at the country level.

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3. As suggested by the President, the Executive Board decided to discuss document DP/1995/25 in two parts: programme priorities; and operational strategies, including resource allocation and institutional adjustments.

Summary of the discussion

Programme priorities

4. A total of 30 delegations took the floor during the discussion on UNFPA programme priorities. Most noted that the document was an excellent basis for discussion on UNFPA future programming and its role in the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action.

5. There was broad-based support among the members of the Executive Board for the UNFPA proposal to concentrate its future funding in three programme areas, namely, reproductive health, including family planning; population policy; and advocacy. Most delegations welcomed the approach and were of the opinion that, with some refining and given the UNFPA comparative advantage, such a shift in policy direction would result in a more strategic focus of UNFPA programming and also strengthen the Fund's ability to assist developing countries in implementing the ICPD Programme of Action.

6. Some delegations raised questions on how the three programme areas would be operationalized. They also sought further elaboration on the different components that would make up the three programme areas. One delegation emphasized that support for the new programme areas should not lead to the marginalization of other important areas of UNFPA work and that a comprehensive approach to the issue of population and development was essential.

7. A number of delegations felt that the document placed too much emphasis on reproductive health, including family planning, at the expense of the other two programme areas. They recommended that UNFPA should be flexible in allocating resources among those three programme areas by taking into account the specific situation and needs of each country.

8. Several delegations emphasized the need to empower women to enable them to become full participants in, and beneficiaries of, population and development efforts. One delegation urged the Fund to cooperate with the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) on the issue of women's empowerment. Another recommended that the Fund should give priority attention to the empowerment of women and consider this issue as a separate programme area. Yet another encouraged the Fund to support efforts that ensured women's involvement in solving population problems.

9. A number of delegations noted the need for consistency in the use of terminology in the area of reproductive health. They therefore recommended that the Fund use the exact language from the ICPD Programme of Action in that respect, namely, "reproductive health, including family planning". Several delegations also stressed the fact that since family planning was an integral component of reproductive health, it should be dealt with within the context

of reproductive health care. One delegation, noting the absence in the document of a comprehensive analysis of UNFPA comparative advantage in the field of reproductive health, asked that it be elaborated on in a revised document.

10. Most delegations generally welcomed the incremental and pragmatic approach towards reproductive health care that built on the system currently in place and took into account the specific situation in each country. One delegation stressed, however, that although the incremental approach was interesting and useful the overall goal should remain a comprehensive approach to reproductive health. Another stressed that family planning and safe motherhood were still main areas for UNFPA assistance and that the concept of reproductive health should be further defined in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

11. The importance of monitoring the expenditures in the so-called population package of the ICPD Programme of Action was stressed by one representative. He also encouraged the Fund to support the reproductive health needs of refugees and displaced persons and to collaborate with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other multilateral and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) active in the field. He further suggested that the Fund give greater priority to the development of method-specific information for clients, particularly on the side-effects of various contraceptive methods.

12. In the area of population policy, several delegations felt that the title of the programme area was too narrowly formulated, noting that the development aspects of population were missing in such a formulation. One delegation therefore suggested using "population and development strategies" in place of "population policy". Since research constituted an important activity in all three proposed programme areas, and particularly in the area of population policy, several delegations suggested that UNFPA identify centres of excellence in developing countries to collaborate in, and/or carry out, the necessary research. Also, some delegations recommended that national experts be invited to participate in international training programmes.

13. In the area of advocacy, a number of delegations urged the Fund to be a strong advocate in the areas of reproductive rights, gender equality, women's education, child survival, elimination of harmful practices against women, the role of men, unsafe abortions, and the sexual and reproductive health needs of adolescents. One delegation supported the Fund's proposal to provide assistance for women's micro-enterprises, but suggested that UNFPA allocate resources only for those initiatives that had a direct link to population programmes. Another delegation recommended that UNFPA use its advocacy role to ensure that all actors involved in the implementation of the Programme of Action assumed their share of the responsibilities.

14. One delegation observed that the document did not adequately describe UNFPA strategy and role in the prevention of HIV/AIDS. Another noted that UNFPA support in the area of HIV/AIDS should be more clearly defined, as should its strategies for integrating HIV/AIDS prevention activities into the Fund's programme.

15. A number of delegations expressed concern about section II of the report on principles. Many felt that UNFPA should endorse the whole set of principles set forth in the ICPD Programme of Action, and in chapter II in particular, rather than single out certain principles as the basis for future UNFPA programming. Some delegations also raised questions about the UNFPA mission statement. Although most welcomed such an initiative, some felt that the Executive Board should be apprised of the statement.

Operational strategies, including resource allocation and institutional adjustments

16. A total of 16 delegations took the floor during the discussion on the proposed operational strategies and a new system for the allocation of resources. Delegations generally supported the development of a new system for resource allocation although a number of delegates expressed reservations. Most felt that more study and discussion was needed before a decision on a new system of resource allocation could be taken. Some feared that the proposal would violate the principle of universality; others expressed concern about the rise in the GNP threshold from $750 to $1,000 in the new system as a criterion for assistance and therefore could not support the proposal.

17. One delegation, supported by others, suggested using adherence to the principles in the ICPD Programme of Action as an additional criterion for resource allocation. Another proposed adding HIV/AIDS prevalence as a criterion. Yet another suggested using the overall literacy rate as an indicator, rather than just female literacy, since both men and women played a role in decision-making regarding family planning.

18. Several delegations felt that any new system should ensure that the bulk of the Fund's resources should be allocated to the least developed countries (LDCs) and to African countries in particular. Others stressed the need to extend temporary assistance to the countries with economies in transition. A number of delegations objected to giving priority to certain regions and suggested that support and assistance should be given to any country in need regardless of the region to which it belonged.

19. Although many delegations underscored the important role of NGOs in the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action, several expressed concern about the selection of NGOs in implementing population and development programmes. Many felt that such selection should be carried out only in close consultation with Governments. One delegate stressed that the UNFPA guidelines on collaboration with the non-governmental sector should give the Fund greater flexibility in the area. Another noted that UNFPA should identify those NGOs that had a comparative advantage in each of the three programme areas. Others wanted to know about UNFPA plans to involve the private sector in population programmes. One delegation suggested that UNFPA take the lead in developing a global partnership between Governments, NGOs and the private sector.

20. Many delegations underlined the importance of inter-agency collaboration and harmonization at the country level, and welcomed the Fund's initiatives and efforts in that area. Several delegations stressed that efforts to

harmonize strategies between the United Nations system and Governments through the country strategy notes (CSNs) was important, emphasizing that such coordination should take place primarily at the country level. They recommended, therefore, that a revised document should clearly spell out the different roles of the actors involved.

21. A large number of delegations expressed their support for designating the UNFPA Country Director as UNFPA Representative, noting that such a measure would greatly enhance the visibility of UNFPA at the country level, strengthen the UNFPA role in inter-agency coordination and strengthen the resident coordinator system. They welcomed the full support in that regard and sought the Executive Director's assurances that such a change in designation would not alter existing arrangements between UNDP and UNFPA in the field or have any budgetary implications. Two delegations expressed reservations about such an arrangement, noting that it was not in keeping with the provisions of General Assembly resolutions 47/199 and 48/162. They worried that such a change might lead to greater fragmentation, rather than greater coherence, of the resident coordinator system.

22. Some delegations voiced their support for the establishment of a separate Executive Board for UNFPA, while others did not find reasons to support such a proposal at that time. Most delegations, however, noted that the upcoming session of the Economic and Social Council was the appropriate forum in which to discuss the issue. Several delegations also spoke on the issue of joining the UNICEF/WHO Joint Committee on Health Policy. While some supported the proposal, most delegations felt that they did not have adequate information on the functioning of the committee to make a decision at that time.

Response of the Administration

23. The Executive Director thanked Executive Board members for their generally positive support for the UNFPA proposals. She agreed that the Fund should be consistent in the use of terminology in the area of reproductive health and assured the Board that UNFPA would adhere to the exact language used in the Programme of Action. She also agreed with the change in designation of the second programme area from "population policy" to "population policy in development strategies". She explained that UNFPA had highlighted certain principles in section II of the report, not because the Fund felt that those principles were more important than the other principles set forth in the Programme of Action, but because they had particular relevance to the work of UNFPA. She pointed out in that regard that the chapeau paragraph in section II of the report clearly stated that all activities in UNFPA-assisted programmes would be undertaken in accordance with the principles and objectives of the Programme of Action.

24. With regard to operationalizing the concept of reproductive health, the Executive Director noted that UNFPA was currently working with WHO and UNICEF in that regard. Moreover, the Fund was reviewing its country programmes to see how such programmes could be adapted to a reproductive health approach. Concerning the proportion of resources earmarked for reproductive health care, the Executive Director stressed that it was a global figure, which was more or less in line with current allocations to family planning and associated

information, education and communications activities. She assured Executive Board members that UNFPA would continue to tailor its assistance to the specific needs of individual countries.

25. With regard to the issue of inter-agency collaboration and the comparative advantages of the different United Nations agencies and organizations, particularly in the area of reproductive health, the Executive Director informed the Executive Board of the progress that had been made by the Inter-Agency Task Force on the Implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action. One of the objectives of the task force was to define the comparative advantages of the agencies in the different areas of the Programme of Action. She promised to keep the Board informed on developments in the inter-agency task force and agreed with the suggestion that the Fund's annual report include a section on the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action.

26. With regard to UNFPA's policy in the area of HIV/AIDS, she reiterated the Fund's strong commitment to the Joint and Co-sponsored Programme on HIV/AIDS, noting that UNFPA had been one of the first organizations to second a staff member to the secretariat of the Programme.

27. With regard to the proposed system for the allocation of resources, the Executive Director admitted that there were limited data available for some of the criteria. It was of utmost importance, therefore, to support initiatives to collect and refine data on such indicators. She said that UNFPA was open to the suggestion to use the $750 figure instead of $1,000 as the threshold for GNP. She reminded Executive Board members, however, that the new system was intended as a proposal and that more analysis was required to elaborate the system. She assured Board members that the Fund would take into account the comments made during the discussion, and said that the Fund would organize informal briefings for Board members before submitting a final proposal to the Board for its approval. The earliest the Fund could expect to submit such a proposal to the Board would be the first regular session 1996.

28. The Executive Director reiterated that UNFPA was fully committed to increasing its allocations to LDCs in general and to African countries in particular. She stressed that the Fund expected the LDCs to benefit most from the proposed strategy for resource allocation. She also noted that the Fund would continue to provide temporary assistance to countries with economies in transition, as called for in the Programme of Action. She agreed that UNFPA had a major role to play in mobilizing resources, both domestic and external, for population programmes and the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action and assured Board members that the Fund was committed to the principle of universality.

29. With regard to the issue of designating the UNFPA Country Director as UNFPA Representative, the Executive Director reiterated that such an arrangement would not have any budgetary implications or alter the current arrangements with UNDP at the country level and would be implemented within the context of and fully support the resident coordinator system.